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ABSTRACT

Securing the right environment for a preschool program requires planning and research. Administrators or searching parties are advised to study zoning codes to become acquainted with state sanitation and safety regulations and laws, to involve teachers in cooperative planning, to design facilities which discourage vandalism, facilitate mainstreaming, and promote sanitation, learning and enjoyment, and to understand the extent of the operator's legal responsibilities. Planners must also consider the outside play area. Adequate play space, safe driveways and parking spaces, additional space for expansion of services, outdoor storage areas, fencing, and windside protection should be taken into account. Buildings should be evaluated in terms of areas available for wet and dry areas, adequate heat and lighting, permanent and moveable stations, and space for quiet and noisy activities. Additionally, characteristics and needs of children, the limits that the building places on children's behavior, and the relationship of activities to the building as a whole must be considered. While the building should be energy-efficient, solar heating may not be cost-effective. Renovation of existing structures provides some advantages but demands a detailed preliminary inspection of building roof and frame, electrical wiring, plumbing, heating and cooling, as well as exterior covering and interior finishes. Appropriate equipment should be purchased for durability, versatility and overall attractiveness. (Author/RH)

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ADMINISTERING THE PRESCHOOL FACILITY

BY

Debbie Coonrod, Ed.D.

Securing the right environment for a preschool program for young children requires planning and research. An administrator or a committee is usually charged with initiating the planning and with finding proper facilities for the program.

Many factors influence the location of housing and the type of housing within which an environment conducive to learning for young children will and can be planned. Initially, whether the administrator or group is looking at new housing or conversion and renovation of an old building, it is necessary to study the zoning codes in the particular city. It is also important to become well acquainted and knowledgeable of the state regulations and laws which define

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the adequacy of the sanitation and safety of the housing. Factors such as the goals and objectives of the program, the specific philosophy, the population, size that is considered desirable, and the funds available will all affect the final decision in selection of housing. The amount of outdoor area available is another consideration which influences the decision for location of a new facility or the renovating of an existing structure.

When possible a wise administrator involves the teachers in the research and development of the blueprints for the facility. This cooperative planning generally stimulates a feeling of loyality and commitment for the program and often results in getting the maximum potential from the space available in the facility.

Knowing licensing standards and regulations thoroughly with an appreciation for the health and safety that is implied for the child can eliminate many costs early in the planning. To demonstrate the value of studying the housing needs we can look at the types of regulations that are mandated in one state in regard to the entrance door--it must open out; it must have panic hardware, the hardware must be at the child's height, it must have no more than twenty-five pounds of tension, it must be recessed three feet, it must be of one hour fire retardant combustion materials. Sliding glass doors are not within code. Housing obtained by administrators with a comprehensive knowledge of standards and an understanding of how each regulation affects each part of the building will

optimally be providing a self-monitoring environment in many aspects for the children while they are engaged in their learning activities.

The energy shortage and utility costs seems to be a national problem today and is affecting planners of programs for young children. Vandalism of materials on playgrounds and break-ins of buildings has increased considerably in this decade. Therefore, a building or new school should be designed to discourage vandalism. The emphasis on mainstreaming the handicapped child into programs as soon as possible raises important construction considerations. This is especially true where preschool programs will be funded by federal monies. It is important then to look at the adaptibility of an existing structure for admitting and servicing handicapped preschoolers. In many states regulations have already been written for programs which plan to provide educational services and day time care for the handicapped preschool child. Therefore, it is very important to know which regulatory agency provides inspection for programs servicing handicapped children.

One of the recent phenomenon in early childhood education is the excellerating enrollment in full-day programs. Business operated daycares are growing at phenomenal rates. Facilities that were originally planned are rapidly being filled and additional facilities are required to be built. This problem of handling large numbers of children being brought to daycare facilities should carry with it a deep

concern and caution for the planning. Child development and early childhood education specialists recognize that large numbers and large spaces tend to dehumanize the child's feelings of self and the effect that he as such a tiny little person can have on his environment. It's also wise to think in terms of the number of children that will also be in the day care setting during the summer. Consideration of the type of needs and programing that might be desirable for the summer activities from the initial planning stage would be reflected in decisions regarding housing, location, and playground.

To fail to foresee legal responsibilities toward the child and his parent in opening a preschool facility is not permissable in today's society. When state legislators and designated regulatory agencies diligently attempt to maintain minimal standards that provide for the safety and health of the child, it behooves the prudent and reasonable man to maintain compliance with those regulations. Child-care is a service for which a fee is being charged. With such a heavy responsibility as protecting the child while he is away from his parents, it is important to consider having legal counsel and a medical doctor as part of the total team that is researching the adequacy of the facility as a preschool program. Every parent is rational in his behavior until it is his child that is injured.

Programs for which housing is sought may include nursery school programs, programs for handicapped children,

private kindergarten, Montasori programs, daycare, summer programs for school age children, after school care, and night time care of children. Throughout the planning stage the priority must always be the focus is on the needs of the child as a learner and as a human being within that environment.

The length of time, the number of children, and the specific hours of the day that the children will be there determines the use (in other words, the wear and tear) the building will receive from the children. The income level of the families being served also influences the abuse that will be dealt the facilities. The facilities should attempt to set limits on children's behavior whether inside or out that are a natural result of the design of the building. Negative comments for controlling behavior by teachers and aides can be minimized by the design of the building. Materials chosen in the construction can lower the noise level and can also lessen derogatory communication between teacher and child. The opportunities for successfully minimizing noise and behavioral problems associated with building design are much less when it is the renovation of an older dwelling or building that is underway.

One regulatory standard which affects all programs whether they are in the daycare home, in a daycare center, or in the nursery school is the amount of space that is to be provided for each child in attendance. Recommendations vary between thirty-five to fifty square feet per child

from the young two through six year old preschooler. Consideration for additional space must be made in programs where adults are in attendance or are accompanying the child occasionally such as in a cooperative nursery school or in laboratory schools where adults will be doing practicum experiences related to their college training. The space that is used for other things such as kitchens, restrooms, laundry facilities, administrative offices, isolation room, lunch room, and observation rooms are to be excluded from that total square foot figure in the planning.

Choosing materials for the construction and in the design of the building can not only be used for deading sounds but can be assembled in a manner that the child is stimulated aesthetically. They can be assembled in a manner that sanitary conditions and cleaning is minimized.

Maintenance needs to be considered in planning the initial building design. In the selection of the roof, the pitch roof probably affords the owner or corporation the lowest maintenance costs.

The Outdoor Playscape

The landscaping or topography of the outside play area is another serious consideration and an important criteria in making that final decision. It is most important to consider how the water from rain or melting snow drain from the building. A beautiful building can be ruined for preschool purposes if water seeps through the foundation or drains across

major entrances or would stand in puddles.

Regulations for the outdoor play area generally are considered to need one hundred (100) to two hundred (200) square feet per child. Of course, it is not always necessary that the outdoor play area be planned with all the children outside at one time. It is important that the land being purchased for the facility provide adequate parking space, allow for safe arrival and departure of children, and that reentry into the main street traffic not be hazardous to drivers.

Another considerations that might be appropriate in the initial survey for land would be the projection from the administrator or planning committee for growth and expansion of their services to larger numbers of young children. A program may have in mind such things as expanding for summer camp activities for school age children during the summer but would not initially have funding to enter into such an endeavor. Also to be considered is the possibility of using middle or high school students from a neighboring school as persons to assist teachers in working with the children. Optimumally the land would allow for the planting of trees and would provide space for gardening. A variety of ground covers or surfaces for children's various activities is desirable. Cement, grass, blacktop, water, pebbles, sand, and dirt are the major surfaces to include in the landscaping.

When we move to the design of the building itself and ponder what indeed are some of the factors that provide a good learning environment, a maximumly save and healthy place in which to work and to play, we need to look at the land and the building as an integrated work and playscape for the

child's day. That means that entrances between the outside environment and the indoor space have transition areas: covered patios and doors that easily provide and facilitate movement of equipment in and out. Location of water spigots for outdoor play. Easy access to restroom needs when playing outside and for cleaning or removing boots before entering the building are priority items to consider. It is the opinion of some building designers and educators that the extension of the work and playscape to the integrated whole of the properties decreases the need for windows. The large low window areas of preschools are an attraction to vandalism in almost every neighborhood today. A bonus from the integration of the total properties as a learning environment is that it releases the child's needs for the freedom of moving between environments. A total environment responds better to the needs of all. Maintenance and heat are also reduced when fewer windows are used in the facility.

Outdoor storage areas for large equipment that would only be used outside is important. To incorporate outdoor storage in the initial construction of the building reduces repairs, leaves land open to a more aesthetic arrangement for play areas, keeps supervision at a minimum and reduces costs when initially included in the architects plans. Entrance into the storage from either inside the building or outside the building can be planned for. The perimeter of the outdoor playspace must in most states be fenced, whether it is a daycare home, a daycare center, or a public school. This fencing needs to allow entrance of delivery trucks into

that play area. The windside of the property needs to be protected with a row of trees and/or bushes. Fencing both hampers young children from wandering away and prevents strange animals and children from wandering into the play area. The entrance into the preschool facility needs to be as much a stimulator of parent involvement in the program as possible. We've mentioned that the parking be adequate both for staff and for parents. The delivery and pick up of the children can be enhanced by a covered walk way. The shurbbery and landscaping should be as carefree as possible. Mother's attitude toward the invitation to park and spend awhile at school may reflect whether the entrance reinforces the teacher's appeal. The entrance will also affect the relationship and attitude between parent and child at pickup time. There is some advantage in mother being able to drive up to the door and pick up her child. On the other hand in large cities where the single parent has custody of the child and where relationships between the natural parents are not always friendly, programs are finding that it is necessary to plan for parking and personal pickup by the authorized person of the child from inside the classroom door.

It is wise to check the nearest location of a fire hydrant to the facility.

The Indoor Playspace

When moving to the inside or the indoor space it

is important to lay out the design of the building so that wet learning activities will be located around running water. Flooring for wet areas, including restrooms and cleaning supplies storage, should have a continuous and seamless covering that rolls up as a baseboard for easier maintenance. Equally important is grouping dry activities together and carpeting that area to reduce the noise. In essence, we want to create an environment that would make living and working together maximumly enjoyable for both staff and children. Storage areas in these two opposite divisions of the room can now be planned for the type of materials that would most likely be stored there. As frequently as possible those storage bins or shelves should be planned on casters for mobility.

While it is necessary to divide the space for wet and dry activities; according to permanent and moveable stations, and for quiet and noisy activities; it is also necessary to look at our philosophy for the movement of children in the room through learning activities with the materials. A number of writers categorize activities and materials by areas such as the creative area, science area, small muscle area, large muscle area, the book area, the music area, the language arts area and so on. Another group of writers in the field of Early Childhood Education group materials together by the type of skill that the child is developing or that is required of the child in the activity. Activities set-up around skills might be categorized as the perception center, the language center, the manipulative center, the imaginative

center, the intellectual center, the social center, the self-help center, and the motor center. These will be rotated as various skills by the particular group of children or by a small group within the group need to work on them. Whichever philosphy the administrator and the planning team prescribes to in designing the interior of the building, the focus should constantly 1) consider the characteristics and needs of children, 2) consider the limits that the center will place on the childs behavior itself and, 3) consider the relatedness of activities that can be proposed for this area and the relationship to the building as a whole. In other words we want space which functions for the teacher in planning to meet the developmental needs of the child and which functions in both stimulating the interests and activities of the child but which is also attractive and pleasing as an atmosphere to any who might enter.

There are many legal aspects to be taken into consideration as one plans the placement of these centers and the type of floor covering and permanent fixtures to install. Wet floor surfaces can produce many accidents if a slick, slippery surface is used. Moveable storage that is not built of an adequately wide base and of adequate weight to prevent turning over if a child climbs on it is inappropriate. Materials intended for a child's use need to be on low shelves within the child's ability to reach.

When planning window space the windows should be openable for children to look out not more than eighteen inches

off the floor, there should be working screens or the windows should have screens and storm windows, they should be of tempered glass or plexiglass. Lighting must be adequate for all parts of the building. Planning draperies at the windows will allow for cutting out light and shutting off cold. Lighting needs to be fifteen (15) candle watt bulbs. Permanent fixtures such as stools and lavatories need to be at child height. Toilet seats generally should be ten (10) - thirteen (13) inches from the floor. Lavatories should be twenty-three (23) - twenty-four (24) inches from the floor. Adult size toilets should be separated by their own door or in their own enclosed restroom. Selecting the wall covering demands a surface that is easily cleanable and almost child proof at least four to five feet from the floor.

The lighting within the room will affect the colors chosen. Blues and greens are cool colors and should be used in an especially sunny room. The yellows and oranges are warm colors and should be used in areas where artificial lighting would be used. Red rarely should be used because it is a very hot color as is pink. Browns and blacks should be avoided because they absorb light.

Solar Heating as an Alternative

At a time when energy costs for heat have become especially burdensome for large open areas and especially where a facility is providing care for the preschool child where the heat is recommended to be kept between 68° - 72° near the floor,

we are presented with a particularly challenging problem of thinking of alternative ways to heat. One consideration has been to look at the prospects of solar heating. It doesn't seem feasible when one looks at the costs and when one looks at the reliability of the current types of solar equipment that a daycare center, a private nursery school - kindergarten program or a daycare home would attempt to add to their conventionally designed buildings. The actual savings would be eaten up indefinitely in terms of the life of most preschool owners by the cost of the addition of the solar system. It has been recommended by some experts in the field of solar energy that there are things that we can do to make the daycare center of the daycare home in Eugene Eckley's terms a solar-tempered home or a solar-tempered center. These suggestions include: (1) large south facing windows, which allow the winter sun to enter the building with an overhang of 3 1/3 - 4 1/2 feet to keep the summer sun from entering, (2) to construct the back wall of the south facing roof of concrete block or stone, (3) to paint concrete floors a dark color so they will absorb heat, and (4) to install ducts in the block or stone walls to help circulate warm air. Other suggestions have included insulating the attic areas, the walls, and around the foundation. Planning for storm doors and windows for all openings shuts out cold drafts.

With these considerations in mind the planning committee can intelligently discuss their needs with an architect. The architect's bid can be checked against the Marshall and Stevens evaluation service put out by the Marshall and Stevens Publishing Co.

Renovating an Existing Structure

Rennovation of an existing facility, added to the initial cost of purchase of the land and dwelling often will cost approximately the same as a new building on today's market if we consider the total number of square footage that has been achieved. There are some advantages in purchasing an existing building. Among those advantages are some of the landscaping; knowledge of the neighborhood and the type families that would be drawn from it; whether this is a business district or a residential district; if zoning has been O.K.'d, if there is good sewage access, and if existing paved streets and easements are already in.

Optimumally, the administrator or planning committee will have a reputable contractor make inspection of the proposed building. Some of the areas for his inspection that will back up the initial committee's inspection are described in the following paragraph. The principle "first things to look at", is a must when looking at existing structures. In other words you want to start with the basic foundation itself - go to the basement first. Are there jack poles which are holding the floors up? If these have to be added that is added cost. Secondly, look for water seepage. Any moisture or any crumbling of mortar between the blocks will show if there is water seepage. Look for dampness or signs of water on the floor from previous rains. Is there water on the floor right now? A water problem is a constant problem and is very

expensive to correct. Any water proofing treatment is only temporary. The third thing to look for is cracking from undue settling. Look for horizontal or vertical cracking on your concrete blocks or your cement walls. Cracking is due to pressure on the walls. Vertical cracks results from settling. The cracks follow the seams and it is not always serious. Horizontal cracks however, indicate bad pressure and it could result in a collasped wall.

While you are in the basement take a look at the floor joists. The floor joists hold the floor up. You want to look (1) for its soundness, (2) for rotting, and (3) for the diminision of structual strength. We need to look for doubled joists where there is an upstairs wall. Look around the exterior to see if there is any rotting of the joist or any termites. If there is rotting the wood will be gray. One of the reasons we are very concerned about the floor is we want to be sure that it will hold the kids and that they won't fall through when they are jumping up and down. Again if the floor joists are not sound it can be very expensive to correct. Be sure to check under the bathroom and see if there is discoloring of the joist there and also discoloring in the flooring. This flooring can be very expensive because you would have the flooring itself to replace, the joist, and also where it dubs into the foundation.

Survey the electrical wiring while you are in the basement. Is it the proper weight wiring? Look at the main service entry, nothing less than a 200 amp system should be provided as a circuit breaker. If you find a fuse box system

you will have to rewire service to the entire house. This too can be costly.

If it needs to be completely rewired; there is a charge per opening for switch, plug, fixture, and terminals. A per opening cost usually is figured in. That cost usually does not include the light fixture but will include wire, box, plug, and labor.

Is it a properly grounded system? Can you find if it is or not?

If there is no basement, check to see if it is a solid slab over footing or if there is a crawl space with basic footings. There should be pad footing under the exterior walls, regardless of what type of foundation you have

The next thing you want to check is the plumbing. The plumbing may be copper which will eventually close from minerial deposits or it may be plastic plumbing lines. Plastic plumbing lines do not corrode or build up; they are fragile when putting them in; they expand and stretch but, plastic plumbing lines and plastic drain lines are very acceptable. When you are getting a plumber to make an evaluation of the condition of the plumbing in the building, check his references. Did he finish his job for what he said he would? Were the customers on his reference list satisfied with his job? It is really important to do some checking into the references of any plumber whom you might call, because of the amount that they charge per hour.

Another area you may want to check is the heating and the cooling. Does the furnace have adequate lines to the upstairs area. Check the duct work. Check the filter. If no filter has been used an overload has been placed on the fan and it has been overworked. This results in weak belts and would mean that a new furnace may be necessary or that inefficient heating will be the result. Only forced air systems have filters. Filters should be changed at least two times in the winter season or even changed monthly. The big offender to the filter system is dust. The filter cloggs up. If the filter is clogged up when you look at it, that's a telltale sign that the furnace hasn't been serviced. There are many types of furnaces wich you would need to look into if you were going to have to replace the present one. There is the gas or electric systems which may be forced air. There is also the heat pump. The indirect electric system through the ceiling radiates heat and will sometimes have cold spots. Another electric system is resistant baseboard heating. The circulating air furnace is recommened by most as the best kind because there is no staleness or no odor.

A chimmney is needed only with gas or oil furnaces. The clay lines on the inside cracks and then the cracks in the mortar start fires where old wood exists. This is especially likely to occur in the attic areas. So it is important to take a look when you are on the roof at the chimmney. Also check the inside of the chimmney.

The second area of the house where major expenses will be deemed necessary if the house is not in good condition is on the top side----the roof. What types of materials have been used? What is the insulation factor? Again check the flu or the chimmney area.

Let's take a look at each of those individually. When you are on the roof or in the attic you want to again look for rotting as you did in the basement. Look for water stains on the rafters. Look for deterioration of the wood. Never buy a house until you have looked at the roof because if the rafters have rotted, there will be a very heavy expense. The entire top of the house would have to come off and those rafters should be bare.

When we look at insulation, if we can see the top of the rafters there is not enough insulation. The insulation needs to be eight (8) - twelve (12) inches. The worst insulation is blown fiberglass, it can be fluffed up when they blow it in and then it will settle and you will not have the amount you need. When they are putting the insulation in you want to get a written guarantee for an R factor of 23, for a year later check, and you still want 10 inches in one year as a part of that guarantee. Cellulose insulation is the best. It is thin layers of paper. Liquid insulation is good, it carries the best R factor. It is three inches of styrofoam.

The weight bearing wall support should come through to the roof line. It should come from the basement to the roof line. This would leave a big beam and open up space. You need to look at the partition wall and check to see if any weight is bearing on that wall.

The attic should be as cold as outside, maybe 180° in the summer. It must have enough ventilation in it. Poor ventilation causes condensation.

Flat roofs are the worse roof you can have, you have to maintain them continuously, mop annually. The weight of the snow will often cause a flat roof to give in. It is good to have felt roofing over the rafters.

Untreated flat roofs would only last about five years. The sloped, natural ceiling with the capacity of eight (8) inches needs a ventilation system. High ceilings raise the cost and raise maintenance costs.

The third and final place you want to inspect is the exterior. Check the exterior covering of the house. Is it a wood frame, is it siding, bricks, stone, veneer, poured concrete? Does it have aluminum, wood, or vinyl siding? Check for crumbling and rotting of the siding. When you get your estimate you want to be aware that a square is a ten by ten area or 100 square feet and that is how they will give the bid. The same is true of the roofing bids. Costs vary by location. You will again want to have a guarantee if siding is put on.

You want to check the trim of the exterior. See if there is caulking around the window area. Does it need to be painted? Painting requires the most maintenance. Don't veneer an old wooden house, only use in a decorative area. Look at the overhang of the house. This is called the sofett area. The border that goes along the sofett is called a facha board.

You are now ready to begin your inspection of the interior finishes. One consideration on the interior is the conditioning of the windows. How many window openings have to be redone. Things to check are the weighted ropes that break and prevent moving the window up and down. Is the window frame weather beaten or rotted? Windows are very expensive to replace. In some older dwellings windows were custom made and would have to be custom made to replace. Storm windows, if needed would also have to be custom made. Do the windows need more glaze? More glaze assures better insulation. Are there storm windows? Will those have to be purchased and installed.

If the ceiling looks bad you may have to put in a suspended ceiling. A suspended ceiling can be moved around. Lighting can be added where needed more easily in the suspended ceiling but another expense to be considered.

Check and see if there is city sewage? Is there a septic system? Some state standards will not accept a septic system in a facility that cares for young children.

Before purchasing and making a final decision total up those costs that seem inevitable. Add to the purchase cost. Determine the square footage and how many children you can house in the facility. Figure it out on a per square foot per child bases and see how much you are paying for what you are getting.

Wall partitions hamper the ability to supervise the children. If the wall is not a weight bearing wall it can be removed.

If it is a weight bearing wall, openings can be cut through the wall without damaging its functional benefits to the structure of the house. This is an additional cost that must be considered and added in.

Redecorating in the form of painting, wallpapering, and carpeting are costs that almost always are necessary things to be done.

Equipment and Supplies

Another area that we want to look at in the administration of a preschool facility is the acquisition and purchase of equipment and supplies. Young children are active and the priority for equipment must focus on the needs of that young child for motion, involvement, and even strenuous activity.

We are talking about an integrated work and playscape for the total indoor - outdoor environment. This recognizes that outdoor play will include that transition area under the roofed patio. It may include a special room set up for active large muscle activity. Whatever the physical space that has been planned to be used will affect the various kinds of equipment that will be ordered.

We need to take into consideration that children of preschool age continue to do a lot of crawling. They have a real need to be engaged in climbing activities. They are still pulling and pushing objects and equipment. They are still exercising their forearm and their throwing muscles. They are learning how to balance their bodies in space.

They still need long areas for running and bicycling and building. They need space for jumping and tumbling, water play, sand play, and dramatic play.

If we look at these physical needs of the child, we begin to see that these needs have to be met on a daily bases. Equipment indoors and out will provide some of the same goals and objectives and will be developing the same kinds of skills.

Most equipment needs to be child sized, however, it depends on the purpose for which equipment will be being used. For example, tables and chairs will not necessarily be all the same height off the floor but they will be observably child sized.

The equipment needs to be purchased for durability, versatility, and overall attractiveness. For example, the puppet stage should be able to serve as a puppet stage and entrance to a house, the grocery store check-out, the post office, and a number of other dramatic play props. The climbing apparatus should lend itself to other types of play, i.e. the curved, rounded, climbing jungle-jim can become an igloo in the winter. The tall standing climbing apparatus that can have sleds or slide attached to it can be taken apart and become a fire station and so on.

The amount of time that equipment will be in use needs to be considered, as well as, the storage problem before the purchase is made. A number of pieces can be converted from household items and used in various ways for the limited budget. Local retired craftsmen will often contribute to work needed in converting or repairing or building new equipment for

preschool facilities. Many environmental things we call "junk" can be converted into games for small motor equipment with some imagination and some thought and time. Criteria to keep in mind when making ones own equipment, as well as, when buying include (1) the size of the pieces; (2) the ages of the children that are being worked with; (3) the edges; (4) the type of paint used; and (5) storage type containers.

Special materials and equipment may be needed to service handicapped children. The administrator will need to carefully consider how much budget is available for such needs.

SUMMARY

Careful, thorough initial planning by the administrator or committee must precede every aspect of that successful school opening. Coordination of many experts is required. Implementing the decisions rendered, however, rests finally on the shoulders of the administrator or planning committee.

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